

# Victim of Bellingham child rapist: 'I want people to know that it happens'

By CALEB HUTTON

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Brian Arntzen

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BELLINGHAM - There's a chance the man in the back of the bus meant nothing by it, nothing sinister, when he smiled and waved at the 21-year-old woman as she climbed down the steps to the sidewalk, panic-stricken, to call 911.

He'd been bouncing a toddler on his knee, sitting beside a young woman. It made Mayah Stancil feel sick. And the look on his face, the way he waved at her, told Stancil he knew exactly who she was.

Stancil sure knew him. You've seen Brian Arntzen's face, too, if you've looked through the local sex offender registry in recent years.

The entry for the 41-year-old Arntzen lists several aliases, his physical description and why he's on it: "Arntzen raped a known 5-year-old female on multiple occasions. He has also admitted to having sexual contact with a known 4-year-old male."

His entry now reflects a 54-month state prison sentence, handed down this month, for failing to register an address with the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office. For the courts, it's often an open-and-shut case. But it's more complicated than that, for Stancil.

Stancil's mom had Mayah, her first child, at age 15. On weekends Mayah would sleep at a home where mom lived with her boyfriend, Brian. Sometimes, before bed, Arntzen gave her baths. He'd help her to slip into her nightgown. Often he would check on her in the middle of the night. He'd kiss her on the forehead or cheek. He later told all of this to a Bellingham police detective, when he was under investigation for raping the child.

A polygraph test suggested he wasn't telling the full truth. Gradually, he confessed he'd once climbed onto the bed next to the girl while she slept.

"I have a masturbation problem," he told the police. Doctors' exams showed it went much further than that, countless times.

As a general policy, The Bellingham Herald does not name victims of sexual assault. Stancil, now an adult, gave permission to use her name. She sees no reason to hide it.

"I want people to know that it happens," Stancil said. "It's important for people to know they're not on their own."

By his 19th birthday, Arntzen had three felonies on his record: burglary, robbery and vehicle theft. Over the next decade he racked up 25 misdemeanors, for numerous counts of driving with a suspended license, minor in possession of alcohol and failure to show up for court.

His rap sheet cuts off abruptly in September 1999. That's when Superior Court Judge David A. Nichols sentenced him to 12 years in prison for rape of a child in the first degree. All but six months of the sentence could be served outside of prison walls, if Arntzen would go to sex-offender treatment, stay drug-free and listen to his probation officer.

He showed promise, briefly.

In a letter to the court, his Department of Corrections supervisor called him "one of the leaders" at his group therapy, and he'd been promoted to manager at his restaurant job.

But around Christmas '99, Arntzen smoked marijuana. He missed two polygraph tests and got kicked out of the sex offender program. For that, Judge David Nichols revoked his out-of-custody treatment and ordered Arntzen to serve the full 12 years.

Six months for child rape. Twelve years for smoking marijuana. It makes no sense to Stancil.

Arntzen got out early, for good behavior behind bars. Outside of the penitentiary, however, he kept finding trouble. After a brief stint in jail, Arntzen - now a sex offender - told sheriff's deputies he'd moved to an address in the 1900 block of Marine Drive. He didn't show up for scheduled check-ins with law enforcement.

So on Feb. 7, 2011, a deputy went knocking. Or tried to. The address he'd given was an abandoned boat shed. No sign of Arntzen.

Four months later, he was pulled over for speeding. Court records allege a deputy found 0.4 gram of methamphetamine in his backpack. The drug charge was dismissed in a deal that summer, when Arntzen pleaded guilty to failing to register as a sex offender. He finished serving a 210-day sentence in jail, then moved into his girlfriend's house on Guide Meridian, near Wiser Lake. According to court records, he stayed there for a little more than a month before going AWOL again.

He was charged with failing to register a second time in May 2012. He managed to post \$10,000 bond.

It was nine months later when Stancil ran into him on the bus, near the Albertson's in north Bellingham. She called 911, in a state of shock, to report she had a no-contact order against him, put in place when Arntzen was sentenced for rape in 1999. It was supposed to last at least 20 years.

But the order hadn't been filed right, as Stancil was later informed. For some reason, paperwork that needed to be added in 2002 wasn't there. The justice system shuffled Stancil through courtroom after courtroom, where each turn brought a new, conflicting path to fixing the court's mistake. First she went to Superior Court, where the order had been issued in the first place. Stancil was told to go to District Court, where a good deal of the county's restraining orders are issued. So she rode the elevator one floor higher. District Court staff took a look at sentencing papers - which spell out, in plain English, that Arntzen can't be near Stancil until 2019 - and saw they had been issued by Superior Court. So she was sent back downstairs. There, she was told the sheriff's office might decipher the problem. They did, by telling her she needed to reapply for a restraining order in District Court.

Deputies tried to serve Arntzen new no-contact papers. When he posted bond, he'd written down an address near Kendall. He wasn't there.

In the end, the court confirmed the original order was still good. Now she carries a notarized copy in her purse, everywhere she goes.

"I mean, I spent at least three hours a day, every day, at the courthouse, for a month," she said. "I was a disaster for weeks. ... I couldn't sleep, I was terrified to leave the house."

Arntzen was arrested Feb. 21 in Snohomish County, on a Department of Corrections warrant. Two weeks later his girlfriend turned in his old smartphone to police. In the download folder there were 38 images of boys and girls younger than 14, nude in various sexual poses, according to charging papers. They'd been downloaded in the week before Arntzen's arrest.

This time he agreed to serve a sentence of 4 1/2 years, more than the state guideline, if the child porn charges would be dropped. Judge Ira Uhrig signed the plea deal Dec. 12.

Stancil moved to the San Juan Islands. She sleeps with nightlights at both ends of her bed. She has endured a lot: A former guardian blamed the rape on her mother not loving her enough. But in fact, for the past 10 years Stancil's relationship with her mom has helped her immensely. She graduated from Meridian High School and Whatcom Community College at the same time, with an overall 3.8 grade point average. She volunteers with mentally disabled teens and adults.

Counseling has helped, too.

"If Brigid Collins (a local, nonprofit family support center) hadn't been there, I - I'm not sure," Stancil said. "I don't think that things would've ended well for me. I'd still be in the middle of everything, just a wreck."

She has told her story at fundraisers for Brigid Collins, once to a crowd of about 200 people. She starts off her talk with all the things she's accomplished in the past 16 years. She wants it to be a message of hope.

Reach Caleb Hutton at 360-715-2276 or [caleb.hutton@bellinghamherald.com](mailto:caleb.hutton@bellinghamherald.com). Read his Dispatcher Blog at [bellinghamherald.com/dispatcher-blog](http://bellinghamherald.com/dispatcher-blog) or follow him on Twitter at [@bhamcrime](https://twitter.com/bhamcrime).

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